

Contribution Title: HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF SCIENTISTS  
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I will take as my theme an editorial which appeared in the 12 October 2006 issue of Nature under the title of “Forgotten Plights”. It begins with a quote from Martin Nemöller who was later murdered by the Nazis. “First they came for the Socialists, and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Socialist... Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak up for me.”

The editorial goes on to say: “Most readers of Nature take it for granted that they can travel to work each day, free to enquire, express opinions and criticize government policy, without fear of intimidation or reprisals - let alone imprisonment or torture. Sadly, these freedoms can only be dreamt of in many countries of the world, where academics must live with, and often suffer directly, human-rights abuses. Their plight is our business”. It concludes with: “All scientists can contribute, by making themselves aware of current cases of human-rights abuses and by lending their support to campaigns against them”.

I will describe briefly a few current cases of colleagues (interpreted broadly) whose denial of human rights is being protested by the Committee of Concerned Scientists and other organizations.